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INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM
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International Environment Forum A Baha'i inspired organization addressing the environment and sustainable development

Website	www.iefworld.org	**Article Deadline next issue 13 May 2016**
Article submission	newsletter@iefworld.org	
Secretariat Email	ief@iefworld.org	General Secretary Emily Firth
President Email	ief@iefworld.org	Arthur Lyon Dahl Ph.D.
Postal address	12B Chemin de Maisonneuve, CH-1219 Chatelaine, Geneva, Switzerland	

From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@ief.org
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Please share the *Leaves* newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

International Environment Forum 20th Annual Conference

Nur University, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, 7-9 October 2016 on the theme
Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as communities and individuals

http://iefworld.org/conf20

In this important year for the launching of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, the conference will focus on three issues that concern everyone, and are of particular interest to Latin America:
• **Responsible and sustainable lifestyles** (SDG12)
• **Values and education** (SDG4)
• **Sustainable urban communities** (SDG11)

The IEF 20th Conference will provide an opportunity to dialogue and reflect about these elements of the SDG framework. It will be relevant to prominent personalities and opinion leaders, government officials, academics and students. It will include some keynotes and workshops, and also sessions for presented papers. If you are interested in participating in the conference or making a presentation relevant to one of its themes, please contact IEF (info@iefworld.org). A formal call for presentations and conference registration will be issued later.

The conference will also provide a forum to consider key issues relevant to Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (https://www.habitat3.org/), to be held in Quito, Ecuador, on 17-20 October 2016. Some participants may also wish to combine it with the dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Santiago, Chile, on 13-16 October.

Harnessing the Power of Collective Learning

IEF Governing Board member Duncan Hanks has co-edited with Roy Steiner a book: "***Harnessing the Power of Collective Learning: Feedback, accountability and constituent voice in rural development***" (London and New York: Routledge, 2016, 260 p.). The book includes eleven case studies of organizations trying to develop and implement collective learning systems as an integral component of sustainable development practice. Both the editors and several of the authors are Baha'is, and this is reflected in their approaches to professional challenges in their field. The initial and concluding chapters by the editors summarize recent learning about more inclusive, bottom-up approaches to development. They reflect on the uses of new information technologies in feedback and learning, on community engagement, and on learning and system-level approached. The emerging elements for collective learning in development that they identify from the case studies include: feedback loops and participant voice, making sense of the data, relationships matter, being systematic ensures coherence, development is learning and learning is key, sustainability, and a common vision of service/learning attitude and culture. Anyone involved in rural development will find in this book many practical examples of learning and good practice in this rapidly evolving field.

Justice in Action: From Local to Global

Several members of the International Forum participated in the 21st annual Justice Conference at de Poort, the Netherlands, a Bahá'í-inspired forum for the exploration of international law, global governance, justice and ethics, which draws lawyers and other experts from all over the world. The theme of the conference this year on 25-27 March was "Justice in Action: From Local to Global". Ismael Velasco presented his work on suicide prevention with young people in Greenland, gave a workshop on "The Next 30 Years: Perspectives on Radical Technological Change & the Social Transformation of Justice - Trends, Prospects and Dilemmas", and also entertained with evening story-telling. Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen spoke on a plenary panel on "Perspectives on Global Order and the Rule of Law" looking at issues of accountability. Arthur Dahl gave a keynote on "*Using the new UN 2030 Agenda to work for justice at the local level*". IEF members Nigel Jollands, Wendi Momen and Iko Kongo also attended the conference.

The conference; keynote by Arthur Dahl

Sylvia and Arthur also ran a workshop on the Paris Climate Agreement negotiations. The workshop reviewed the dynamics of the complex multiyear negotiations leading up to COP21 that resulted in the Paris Agreement adopted on 12 December 2015, and discussed the many opportunities for participation in discourses alongside the negotiations, including the side events that IEF organized in Paris (http://iefworld.org/cop21). It explored the lessons for international governance, the role of Bahá'í-inspired organizations, and the ways such events can be used to contribute Bahá'í perspectives on issues important to society.

Sylvia Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen; panel of Neysun Mahboubi, Sylvia and Maya Groff

Other high-level presentations included a session on Building a Global Human Rights Campaign: Education is not a crime, with film-maker Maziar Bahari, and the screening of his film "To Light a Candle". John Christensen of the Tax Justice Network spoke on "Catalysing Policy Reform at National and Global Levels: Tax Justice, Economic Inequality and Human Rights". The final plenary was by Kirsten Meersschaert, Director of Programs of the World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy, working on the Coalition for the International Criminal Court and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, and Susan Lamb, Senior Legal Advisor to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability, which is collecting evidence of violations of international criminal and humanitarian law in Syria.

John Christensen; Susan Lamb and Kirsten Meersschaert

While he was in the Netherlands, Arthur also gave two seminars at Wageningen University where Sylvia teaches, one on "Is Science Enough? Exploring the relationship of science and religion in addressing sustainable development" where about 36 students and faculty members came for a discussion over lunch. The second seminar was on "Management of coral reef ecosystems" for the coral reef research group.

IEF Sustainable Energy Group

The IEF is establishing a Task Group focusing on sustainable energy. The purpose of the Task Group will be to:

1. Find ways of working together and supporting each other's work
2. Identify opportunities for IEF intervention in UN and other relevant fora on sustainable energy
3. Linking youth/students to mentors

If you are a student or professional in sustainable energy (economics, engineering, policy, politics, sociology, community work), then please contact Nigel Jollands (n.jollands@gmail.com) to register your interest or find out more.

Energy efficiency and energy poverty – strange bed fellows in the Western Balkans?

Nigel Jollands (n.jollands@gmail.com)

Jasmina is no stranger to the trials and tribulations associated with energy efficiency policy development. As Head of the Energy Efficiency Department in a country in the Western Balkans, she is on the front line of energy efficiency policy development in her country every day. She and her small team of people are constantly having to balance their limited resources and work within a Ministry with many competing demands beyond energy efficiency.

What Jasmina knows, and many like her are beginning to understand, is that energy efficiency is at the forefront of addressing energy poverty in the Western Balkans. Many citizens in the Western Balkans, like many people in many countries around the world are facing significant energy poverty. Access to energy – and the services it provides like heating and cooling – are expensive, and with tariff increases across the Western Balkans, they are becoming more expensive.

According to the IEA[1] 17% of global population lack access to electricity and 38% of global population lack clean cooking facilities. While access to energy is fairly widespread in the Western Balkans, another way to define energy poverty is that a household is energy poor if it spends more than 10% of its income on energy. Using this definition, energy poverty levels in the Western Balkans are at a critical level. For example, according to research done for the EBRD, in Albania and Kosovo the average energy costs are over 10% for most of the income groups – meaning that a significant portion of the society could likely be classified as in "energy poverty". Furthermore, not surprisingly, low income households have fewer energy efficient technologies installed in their homes compared to higher income households. For example, according to the EBRD, in the Western Balkans, only 2-3% of low income households have energy efficient window replacements compared to 85% for high income households (EBRD, 2015).

Energy efficiency is one of the most cost-effective ways to address energy poverty. From the no-to-low cost actions such as draught stopping to installing more energy efficient technologies into a home, energy efficiency has been demonstrated by numerous studies to deliver enormous benefits per dollar or euro of input. One study[2] for example in the UK showed that energy efficiency actions were delivering saved energy at a cost of about 1/10 that of the cost of energy supply.

Many countries in the Western Balkans are making some progress in their energy efficiency policies. For example, Albania is preparing its much overdue updated National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) and there are on-going efforts to transpose the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD).
Bringing the EU EPBD into legal force in Western Balkan countries is particularly important. Through this Directive, the energy efficiency of new and renovated buildings will be improved, cutting the cost of heating and cooling – the major energy costs for many Western Balkans households.

In order to assist the Western Balkans to transpose the EPBD, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Energy Community Secretariat are cooperating on 'REEP' – the Regional Energy Efficiency Programme – a €2m programme funded by the EU, EBRD and SIDA over 3 years. The REEP has provided the following assistance:

- For EPBD transposition, REEP has delivered draft primary laws on building energy efficiency to Kosovo and Albania; developed implementing regulations required under EPBD on energy efficiency boiler inspections to Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Serbia and Kosovo; developed minimum energy performance requirements standards developed for FYROM and Kosovo; energy performance certification of buildings for FYROM and Kosovo; developed national calculation methodology to FYROM, Kosovo and Bosnia i Herzegovina Federation (BiH-F); prepared national calculation software to FYROM, Kosovo and BiH-F
- On energy efficiency procurement, REEP has delivered draft procurement rulebooks to Serbia and Montenegro;

- Supporting the development of energy efficiency obligations – an important mechanism to ensure energy supply utilities deliver energy efficiency – REEP has delivered draft amendments to primary laws and regulations to Montenegro and Croatia;
- A draft National Energy Efficiency Action Plan for Albania.

This is very detailed, technical work. And at first glance to a politician, doesn't appear to have any connection at all to energy poverty alleviation. However, dealing with buildings energy efficiency is critical to reducing energy poverty. Improved energy efficiency doesn't just make energy bill cheaper. Work by the IEA on multiple benefits[3] of energy efficiency shows that energy efficiency addresses many other issues that disproportionately affect poor – such as improving the liveability and comfort of homes and reducing illness. Explaining these links to politicians is important to ensure that work on energy efficiency policy continues.

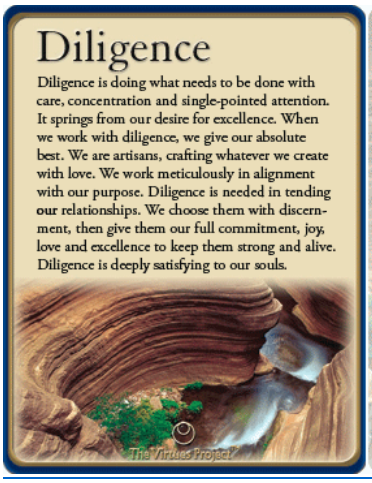
The work of explaining these links and establishing the energy efficiency policy framework comes down to the commitment and hard work of the government officials on the ground. Energy Efficiency relies on the dedication and perseverance of people like Jasmina. Tomorrow she'll be back at her desk on the frontline as usual.

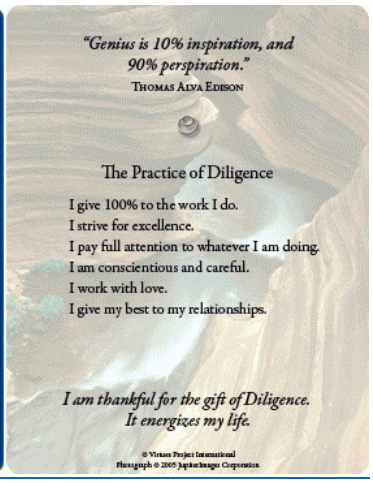
1 http://www.iea.org/topics/energypoverty/

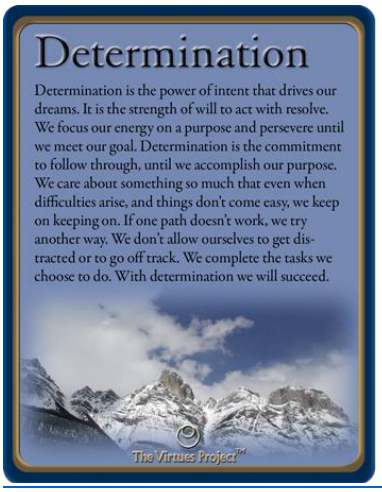
2 WEC-ADEME Case study on Energy Efficiency Measures and Policies, August 2010, "European and South American Experience of White Certificates"

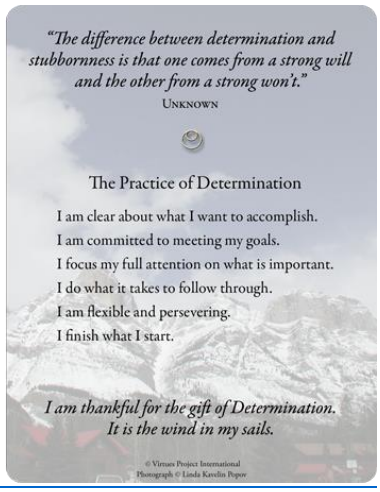
3 http://www.iea.org/topics/energyefficiency/energyefficiencyiea/multiplebenefitsofenergyefficiency/

I See Your Virtues









SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/energy

Energy for Sustainable Development

Energy is an essential factor for sustainable development and poverty eradication. Nevertheless, it is estimated that in 2015 still about 2.8 billion people have no access to modern energy services and over 1.1 billion do not have electricity. Furthermore, around 4.3 million people are dying prematurely every year due to indoor pollution resulting from cooking and heating with unsustainable fuels. The challenge lies in finding ways to reconcile the necessity and demand for modern and sustainable energy services with its impact on the environment and the global natural resource base in order to ensure that sustainable development goals are realised.

The complex challenges of energy and sustainable development were highlighted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Energy was discussed throughout Agenda 21. Agenda 21 highlighted the fact that current levels of energy consumption and production are not sustainable, especially if demand continued to increase and stressed the importance of using energy resources in a way that is consistent with the aims of protecting human health, the atmosphere, and the natural environment.

Bahai House of Worship Lotus goes green—Now on Solar Energy

http://ohindore.com/indore-latest/bahai-house-of-worship-lotus-temple-is-on-solar-energy-now/
Sameer Sharma October 20, 2015

Popular attraction in the capital of India, the Lotus Temple (Baha'i House of Worship)is one of the few tourist spots to tap renewable energy. A part of the temple is now being run on solar power – a move the Delhi government must consider for other monuments in the national Capital.

The temple, which utilises around 500 kilowatt of power in total, generates 120 KW on its own. Besides, it is the first major public site in Delhi to have installed a "net metre". This has made the temple the first in the city to be a part of the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission's (DERC) "Net Metering" regulations.

With the growing popularity of solar power, the latest to join the tribe is the famous Lotus Temple, situated in South Delhi. Lotus Temple has opted for a 120 KW solar power connection which will enable it to save around Rs. 1.2 lakh in energy bill every month. Apart from the Lotus Temple, eleven schools have also opted for solar power connections from BSES with a total sanctioned load of 535 KW.

The BSES has decided to aggressively promote solar power across its area of operation and has decided to organise power enclaves to educate costumers about benefits of Net Metering. "We are promoting 'net metering' among our consumers. We have started organising Power Conclaves to educate large customers about the Net Metering policy and its beneficial impact on their electricity bill," the spokesperson said.

- A part of Lotus temple , Delhi is now being run on solar power and it is the first public site to have installed " net metre".
- The temple, which utilises around 500 kilowatt of power in total, generates 120 KW on its own.
- Members of Lotus Temple said the move has helped them save around Rs. 1.2 lakh as electricity bills every month.

Resources for "Earth Day Sunday" and "Faith Climate Action Week"

The Forum on Religion and Ecology Newsletter 10.4 (April 2016) news@religionandecology.org

On April 22, Earth Day will be celebrated around the world. Earth Day Sunday will be celebrated the Sunday before or after Earth Day (April 17 or 24). "Faith Climate Action Week" will take place during Earth Week, April 15-24. You can incorporate these resources into your celebrations:

"Care for God's Creatures" Earth Day Sunday Resource by Creation Justice Ministries
www.creationjustice.org/creatures
"Trees for the Earth" Earth Day Sunday Resource by Catholic Climate Covenant
http://org2.salsalabs.com/o/5256/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=9558
"Faith Climate Action Week" Resources by Interfaith Power & Light
http://www.faithclimateactionweek.org/

"Faith & Climate Change: A guide to talking with the five major faiths"

Climate Outreach February 2016 http://climateoutreach.org/download/7005/
This guide is intended to provide practical guidance for climate communicators, both inside and outside faith communities, about what language works well and – crucially – what language might pose an obstacle for communicating with any specific faith group. In April 2015, GreenFaith asked Climate Outreach to develop and test language around climate change that could mobilise activity across five main faith groups (in alphabetical order: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism) in the run-up to the 2015 world climate conference in Paris. This research may be the first of its kind: not only does it seek language that works with each of the faiths, it seeks language that works across all of them.

Harmony with Nature virtual dialogue

http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/

In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 22 April as International Mother Earth Day. In so doing, Member States acknowledged that the Earth and its ecosystems are our common home, and expressed their conviction that it is necessary to promote Harmony with Nature in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations. The same year, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on Harmony with Nature.

The General Assembly has widely acknowledged that the world's depletion of natural resources and rapid environmental degradation are the result of unsustainable consumption and production patterns which have led to adverse consequences for both the Earth and the health and overall well-being of humanity. The scientific community has well documented evidence that our present way of life, in particular our consumption and production patterns, has severely affected the Earth's carrying capacity.

Loss of biodiversity, desertification, climate change and the disruption of a number of natural cycles are among the costs of our disregard for Nature and the integrity of its ecosystems and life-supporting processes. As recent scientific work suggests, a number of planetary boundaries are being transgressed and others are at risk being so in a business-as-usual world. Since the industrial revolution, Nature has been treated as a commodity that exists largely for the benefit of people, and environmental problems have been considered as solvable through the use of technology. In order to meet the basic needs of a growing population within the limits of the Earth's finite resources, there is a need to devise a more sustainable model for production, consumption and the economy as a whole.

Devising a new world will require a new relationship with the Earth and with humankind's own existence. Since 2009, the aim of the General Assembly, in adopting its five resolutions on 'Harmony with Nature', has been to define this newly found relationship based on a non-anthropocentric relationship with Nature. The resolutions contain different perspectives regarding the construction of a new, non-anthropocentric paradigm in which the fundamental basis for right and wrong action concerning the environment is grounded not solely in human concerns. A step in this direction was further reaffirmed in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012), entitled "The future we want":

"We recognize that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that "Mother Earth" is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, and we note that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development."

The UN General Assembly, as its 70th session, adopted the seventh resolution on Harmony with Nature as contained in the Report of the Second Committee (A/70/472/ADD.7) also available at http://bit.ly/1J3Nfhv. This resolution for the first time:

1. Decides to initiate, in 2016, a virtual dialogue on Harmony with Nature among, inter alia, experts on Earth Jurisprudence worldwide, including those who have been active in the interactive dialogues of the General Assembly, in order to inspire citizens and societies to reconsider how they interact with the natural world in order to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in Harmony with Nature, noting that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development.
2. Further requests that the experts submit a summary of the virtual dialogue to the General Assembly at its seventy-first session.
3. Decides to host the virtual dialogue at the website on Harmony with Nature.

IEF President Arthur Dahl is one of the experts invited to participate in this virtual dialogue over the next two months.

Don't Even Think About It (book review)

http://iefworld.org/node/792

Don't Even Think About It: Why our brains are wired to ignore climate change, by George Marshall (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 261 p.
Reviewed by Arthur Dahl.

As the science of climate change has become clearer, and the threats to human well-being more obvious, it has become increasingly apparent that scientific information alone does not motivate action. In fact, the magnitude of the threat seems to have produced the opposite, an increasing denial of the facts and a refusal to act. George Marshall, founder of the Climate Outreach and Information Network, as drawn on 25 years' experience, and interviews with actors across the spectrum from scientists to deniers, to explain why this is the case. Through a set of short and readable stories about people he has met, he explains all the reasons why we are failing to grasp the issue and react accordingly. One strength of the book is the way it explains the different perspectives from which people approach the issue of climate change.

On the social side, we follow the thinking of the in-group we belong to, listen to people we trust, fail to see the whole picture, and risk rejection or more if we try to think differently. Labelling climate change as an environmental issue, somehow distant and a conspiracy threatening to our way of life, does not help. Our brains respond poorly to distant, diffuse, uncertain threats and fall back on short-term certainty. Our confirmation bias means that we select the information that conforms to our existing views. Even climate change victims deny the real source of their problems.

Marshall describes the difficulties scientists face in trying to communicate the climate change issue, ranging from scientific uncertainty to vicious personal attacks to destroy their credibility. What chance does scientific truth have against more appealing lies and disinformation manipulated by media professionals whose only motivation is to win the argument? He dissects as a professional many of the failures in climate change communication.

Towards the end of the book, he explores the moral imperatives, and the challenge to scientists who are expected to remain neutral and objective when the survival of humanity is at stake. We are failing to engage the emotional side of human nature. He discusses the false divide between science and religion, and the importance of learning from religion how to motivate people to sacrifice in the short term for long term benefits.

In his concluding sections, Marshall makes recommendations for how to do things differently. Climate change is happening and is an immediate threat for which we must prepare now while looking to the future. Since negative messages do not work, we need a narrative of positive change with many meanings from peoples' different perspectives, something that Baha'is do quite naturally from their positive vision of the future. We need a narrative of cooperation in a common cause building on a spectrum of approaches, activating cooperative values rather than competitive values, and stressing what we all have in common. We should relate solutions to climate change to the sources of happiness and the connections that we feel with others, creating communities of shared conviction. We can present climate change as a journey of conviction and informed choice between desirable and catastrophic outcomes, invoking the nonnegotiable sacred values. Climate communicators should emphasize the qualities that create trust, and be emotionally honest in talking about their hopes, fear and anxieties with moral consistency, recognizing the role of their own emissions, and affirming wider values across the partisan gap. We should recognize people's feelings of grief and anxiety, mourn what is lost (including the fossil fuel age) and value what remains. He concludes: "Acceptance, compassion, cooperation and empathy will produce very different outcomes than aggression, competition, blame and denial. We hold both futures within ourselves and, as we choose whether and how to think about climate change, we are choosing how we will thing about ourselves and the new world we are creating."

This is a book that will be useful far beyond those dealing just with climate change, since it addresses issues of reaching people's hearts as well as their minds, challenging their assumptions, and empowering them to be open to change and to work together for the betterment of their communities and society.

Yale Advances in Shaping Portfolio to Address Climate Change

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/business/energy-environment/yale-advances-in-shaping-portfolio-to-address-climate-change.html
http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/yale-advances-in-shaping-portfolio-to-address-climate-change/

April 12, 2016 By Geraldine Fabrikant New York Times

Yale University has made progress in minimizing its endowment portfolio's exposure to less environmentally sound investments such as stocks of companies that contribute to climate change, a letter released on Tuesday showed.

Yale generally does not manage its own investment directly but hires outside money managers to make decisions. Nearly two years ago, the Yale University Investment Office asked the firms that managed its endowment, then $20.8 billion, to assess their investments. The office asked managers to avoid investments that did not take sensible steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Yale endowment, while not the largest, is closely watched by other universities and money managers who invest in publicly held companies.

On Tuesday, David F. Swensen, Yale's chief investment officer, released a letter to the school's Advisory Committee on Investor Responsibility saying that Yale had taken several steps with climate change in mind.

Rather than simply selling investments as a response to political pressures, Yale was asking its managers to consider the financial risks of climate change and the risks that those investments held if governments did impose carbon taxes. "What we did was to take a look at the economics and come up with an economically driven decision," he said in a telephone interview. Mr. Swensen added that the reaction was heartening.

"When we sent out the letter, one of our energy-focused managers, Arc Financial, did an analysis of a carbon audit of every single energy position in the portfolio and assessed the exposure to more stringent emissions regulation," he said. "They are using it as a tool when they make new investments. They also published a white paper on the issue."

In his letter to the committee, Mr. Swensen pointed out that the firm developed "a framework for assessing, reporting and comparing the greenhouse gas intensity of fossil fuel operations on an apples-to-apples basis."

Two of Yale's other money managers had positions that were not consistent with Yale's approach, Mr. Swensen wrote. One held a small position in a company that engaged in the production and sale of coal. Another had interests on Yale's behalf in two publicly traded oil sands producers. Though the investments were valued at only $10 million in total, those positions have since been sold.

While it would not have been as easy for Yale to sell investments in individual companies because it does not manage most of its money internally, it still has some separate accounts that would allow the endowment to sell those stocks as it did when it sold holdings in South Africa and Sudan some years ago.

For example, the Yale endowment was close to making an investment in an energy company. "That investment had even been approved by the endowment's board," Mr. Swensen said. "But when we sat down with the company and brought up these issues, they denied it was a problem, so we did not go forward with the investment."

The move came out of growing pressure from students concerned about environmental issues. Some universities have divested themselves of fossil fuel stocks, while others have resisted action, arguing that they do not want to terminate a dialogue with such companies.

Mr. Swensen pioneered the use of alternative investments in such areas as hedge funds. Over the 20-year period that ended June 30, 2015, Yale had the strongest performance record in the endowment world. For that fiscal year, Yale turned in an 11.5 percent increase, bringing its endowment to $25.6 billion.

Mr. Swensen's average return over 10 years ending June 2015 was 10 percent, slightly eclipsed by returns at M.I.T., Bowdoin College and Princeton. At each of those schools, the endowment is led by a manager who trained under Mr. Swensen in the investment office at Yale.

Mr. Swensen recalled that the initial approach came up after Yale decided that it would not simply ask managers to sell shares in companies under question. Yale's president, Peter Salovey, asked Mr. Swensen what the school could say, and the investment office came up with this plan.

World's biggest wealth fund excludes 52 coal-related groups

http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/15/worlds-biggest-wealth-fund-excludes-52-coal-related-groups

Norway's sovereign wealth fund divests from energy companies that derive more than 30% of revenues from coal, on ethical grounds

Companies banned from Norway's fund include many US and Chinese firms, including China Coal Energy, AES and Peabody Energy. Photograph: Seth Perlman/AP

Agence France-Presse
Friday 15 April 2016 05.15 EDT

Norway's sovereign wealth fund, the world's biggest, has excluded 52 coal-related companies in line with new ethical guidelines barring it from investing in such groups, Norway's central bank said on Thursday.

The move was seen as a sign of the growing influence investors wield in the fight against climate change.

In June 2015, the Scandinavian country's parliament agreed to pull the fund out of mining or energy groups which derive more than 30% of their sales or activities from the coal business.

The new directive went into effect on 1 February.

The fund, fuelled by Norway's state oil revenues and currently worth around 7.11tn trillion kroner (£610bn, $864bn), has banned 52 companies, most of them US and Chinese, including China Coal Energy, AES, and Peabody Energy, the biggest US coal producer which filed for bankruptcy on Wednesday.

The list also includes several Indian companies, such as Reliance Power and Tata Power, three Japanese groups and several European companies.

"Further exclusions will follow in 2016," the central bank, which manages the fund, said in a statement.

Thursday's announcement was hailed by environmentalists.

"It's an important first step," Martin Norman, the head of Greenpeace Norway, told AFP.

"The road ahead remains long though," he added, noting that his organisation had a while ago counted 122 companies the fund needed to bar to be in line with the new directive.

The world's three biggest coalmakers – Anglo American, BHP Billiton and Glencore – are not affected by the new rules because their other mining activities are so massive that their coal businesses represent less than 30% of their overall revenues.

But Norman said he hoped they would soon be excluded because of another criteria adopted last year, which prohibits the fund from investing in groups that produce “unacceptable levels” of greenhouse gas emissions.

“It’s a good start,” added Marius Holm, the head of the environmental group Zero.

“But the fund still holds stakes in coal-related companies, and its exposure to oil and gas also needs to be discussed,” he said.

The fund’s investment policy is run according to strict ethical rules, with a focus on sustainable economic, environmental and social development.

Those rules bar it from investing in companies accused of serious violations of human rights, child labour or serious environmental damage, as well as manufacturers of “particularly inhumane” arms, and also tobacco firms.

The list of 52 companies includes some of those the fund has divested from since 2013 on its own initiative, judging the companies’ environmental impact was damaging to their financial viability.

Controlling 1.3% of the world’s market capitalisation, the fund is intended to finance Norway’s generous welfare state indefinitely.

Harnessing the Power of the Saharan Sun in Maghreb

http://www.unep.org/stories/MoroccoMaghreb/Harnessing-the-Power-of-the-Saharan-Sun-in-Maghreb.asp

From Casablanca to the Kasbah, North Africa's Maghreb region is fast becoming the world's leading clean energy hub. Famous for its holiday destinations, the sun-drenched region boasts one of the most ambitious solar projects in the world.

Dubbed "the door of the desert", the picturesque Moroccan city of Ouarzazate is making a name for itself as something much more than a staple of backpackers' bucket-lists. It is the site of the world's largest concentrated solar power plant.

Named after the Arabic word for light, the Noor 1 solar power plant, with a maximum capacity of 160 megawatts, started producing electricity in February. Once completed in 2019, the entire Noor-Ouarzazate project will cover up to 18 per cent of Morocco's annual electricity generation. It will save the country one million tonnes of oil equivalent and prevent the emission of 3.7 million tonnes of CO2.

The Noor plant is part of Morocco's ambitious Solar Energy Programme, which will see five solar power projects spread over 10,000 hectares built by 2020 at a cost of $9 billion. According to the Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2016, released by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) last month, Morocco invested more than $2 billion dollars in renewable energy in 2015.

In May this year, countries will meet in Nairobi for UNEA 2 - the world's de facto "Parliament for the Environment" - to discuss ways of fighting climate change by delivering clean, affordable energy for everyone. Finding means of financing the developing countries' renewable energy ambitions will be crucial to achieving the promise of the Paris Agreement – to keep the global warming to well below 1.5°C.

Morocco's solar project is underwritten by a number of financial institutions, including the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, the German KfW Development Bank and the French Development Agency. Additional support is provided by the Climate Investment Funds.

This international finance has been a critical factor in reducing the project's risk and enhancing its financial viability by reducing the cost of investment and, as a consequence, the cost of electricity. Morocco, which will be hosting the next global climate conference, COP 22, is aiming to become a leading renewable energy producer in the region and is exploring the possibilities of exporting its clean electricity to Europe.

Between them, Morocco's planned solar and wind projects could produce up to 42 per cent of the country's electricity by 2020. Reaching this goal would be a game-changer for the Kingdom, which currently imports 96 per cent of its energy, making it the largest importer in North Africa.

Across the border, Tunisia is also looking to the abundant sunlight as a source of energy, eyeing a 30 per cent clean power generation target by 2030. One of the routes the country is pursuing to harness this resource is the use of rooftop solar water heaters.

As in many parts of the world, however, the purchase price for a solar water heater can be many times the total monthly earnings of most households. This high upfront cost presented a significant financial barrier for many families, even though a solar water heater can pay for itself in as little as four years.

Despite this short payback time, loans were often difficult to obtain because the banks were reluctant to lend for what they saw as an unfamiliar energy technology. Households also tended to favour the heavily subsidized gas-fired units.

To address this barrier, UNEP initiated the Mediterranean Investment Facility for renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies in Tunisia, Montenegro, Morocco and Egypt. The facility helps local governments and financial institutions offer two key incentives – a reduced rate reduction and a guarantee for commercial loans.

The mechanism offers five-year loans for residential solar water heaters with repayments made through a customer's monthly electricity bill. It also includes a 20 per cent subsidy of the initial cost, which makes solar water heaters competitive with natural gas.

Through the facility, the initial $2.2 million funding from the Italian Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea has leveraged a total investment of more than $200 million. Inspired by the success of the project, other Mediterranean countries – Montenegro and Egypt – have replicated it at home.

Whether building the world's largest solar power plant or investing in a household water heater, financing will be key to achieving the ambitious goals set by the Paris Agreement. When countries meet at UNEA-2 next month to find ways of mobilizing the billions of dollars needed for investments in sustainable development and climate action, Morocco's and Tunisia's experiences will stand as shining examples of the kind of returns that these investments can produce.

How science can help to create a sustainable world

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Science is critical to tackle complex challenges for humanity such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and poverty reduction, as it lays the foundation for new approaches and solutions. How can science best fulfill this commitment to society? How can we create dynamic connections between knowledge and action? These concerns have led to a new approach: sustainability science. UNESCO, with the generous support of the Government of Japan, is bringing together key stakeholders from academia, the policy-making community, specialized institutions and the United Nations in order to better define and broaden the sustainability science approach in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This 2-year project was launched during a symposium held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris earlier in April.

"*The 2030 Agenda is transformative, and it requires a multidisciplinary approach to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, while ensuring policy coherence across the different interventions*" explained Nada Al-Nashif, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences. "*This is a critical role for sustainability science - as it promotes cross-disciplinary approaches to advance the understanding of human-environment interactions and systems, and how these interactions affect the challenge of sustainability*."

The sustainability science approach is essential for effective decision-making with regard to global sustainability, since social, environmental and cultural systems are closely linked. UNESCO will continue, with its partners, to continue to support efforts to educate and advocate the development of this approach. This approach is a powerful reminder of the complexity of the challenges the world is facing, and the immense responsibilities this creates for international organizations like UNESCO.

"*Resilience and adaptation are essential conditions in our quest for sustainability, and these must be informed by science and other knowledge*" said Flavia Schlegel, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for the Natural Sciences. "*Sustainability science is an issue of a normative nature: it is an approach which will allow to capitalize on research as a tool to solve problems. It will assist in tackling complex problems related to sustainability, from disaster risk reduction to food, water and energy security, to societal decarbonized paths, by informing the design of integrated sectoral policies based on the best scientific knowledge available*."

H.E. Mrs Kuni Sato, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO, confirmed that sustainability science in combination with education play a key role in sustainable development. She expressed her satisfaction at the fact that relevant UNESCO Programmes are working closely together to support this finding.

Any attempt to develop a shared global platform which aims to produce scientific evidence for policy-making on sustainability needs to take into account that Member States assess evidence in different manners, and employ different modes of reasoning in their decision-making processes. The support for sustainability science has a clear political dimension which requires the establishment of exchange platforms in UNESCO to facilitate a fluid conversation among all parties concerned.

Three Symposiums will be organized in the framework of the project, to bring together key experts and perspectives. The second symposium will take place in early 2017. The final outcome of the Project will be a set of policy guidelines defining sustainability science, setting the principles within which the approach should be undertaken, and providing guidance on its application at multiple levels.